News release

Severe floods hit south-west England

16 August 2004

Heavy, thundery downpours developed by midday across south-west England today. These showers formed bands which aligned themselves with the wind helping to maintain the heavy rain across certain areas of north Cornwall for several hours. The trigger mechanisms for these storms appears to be convergence of winds along the coast and the high ground in the local area which also helped to generate showers. It would appear that the serious nature of these floods has been exacerbated by the local topography around Boscastle.

Bands of showers forming in this manner is not unusual, but the intensity and persistence of these that resulted in such flooding is rare.

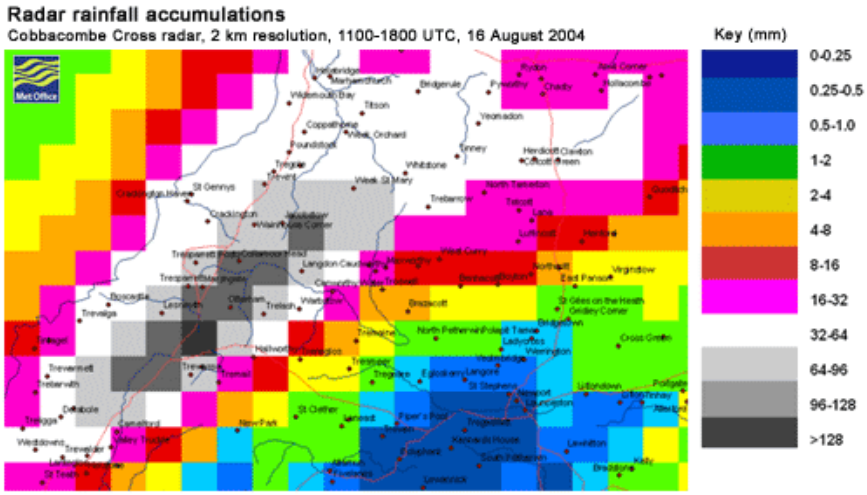
The forecast was for heavy, often torrential downpours developing through the day, but the exact location of where these would develop is always problematic.

Forecasters, using radar and ground-based rain gauges, were able to give further warnings as these showers formed through the afternoon.

The heavy showers are expected to slowly die out through this evening and overnight, but further rain is expected in the south-west through Tuesday.

The highest rainfall totals for the day so far are for Slaughterbridge in Cornwall, which has received 74.5 mm so far today. (Around 60 mm of which fell in around 2 hours) — more is expected through the next few hours.

Map showing radar rainfall accumulations: Click for full size



The average monthly rainfall for that area in August is 100-120 mm over the high ground, with 70-90 mm at lower levels around Boscastle itself.

Other similar serious flooding events that have occurred in the past include:

- July 1955 Martinstown Dorset (279.4 mm in 24 hours)
- June 1917 Bruton, Somerset (242.8 mm in 24 hours)
- August 1924 Cannington, Somerset (238.8 mm in 24 hours)
- August 1952 Lynmouth, Devon (229.5 mm in 24 hourss)
- June 1957 Camelford, Cornwall (203.2 mm in 24 hours)

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